

The Value of a Tabletop Exercise for Pandemic Influenza Preparedness

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Preconceived Notions:

Tabletop exercises are ...

- Boring
- Expensive
- Labor-Intensive to set up
- Too time consuming
- Effort that could be used more productively

In Reality, Tabletops Are ...

- Engaging if not engrossing
- Reasonable in cost
- Very time efficient
- Extremely productive

...but DO require a lot of effort to prepare

The Value of Preparation

- Planning the scenario is essential
- Use an objective (outside), experienced facilitator
- Determine primary goals: education, performance evaluation, or both
- Invite outside attendees who would be involved in actual event

Limitations of a Tabletop

- Not every contingency can be evaluated
- Reality of decisions with major economic impact of hard to test
- Compressed time frame

Lessons Learned

- Need for redundancy of personnel
- Importance of multiple modes of communication to outside: phone, Internet, radio, TV, etc.
- Value of just-in-time video training
- Need for psychological support/mental health counselors

More Lessons Learned

- Assure that adequate input is provided for decisions that affect multiple layers of the organization
- Have adequate messaging support or designate runners
- Value of a secure system for sharing emerging information

Final Thoughts

- Need a detail-oriented planner
- Use an experienced moderator
- Use breaks; feed your attendees
- Prepare for real-time messaging
- NIMS (National Incident Management System) training in advance is very helpful

Conclusions

- Limit the time involved
- Know what you will be evaluating in advance
- Prepare a carefully considered report
- Let the community know what you have done

Future Plans

- Provide assistance to other groups planning their first tabletop exercises
- After recommendations of tabletop are implemented, consider larger-scale exercise to fully test system preparedness